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AUTHOR Blai, Boris, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Employee wellness directly affects business/industry operations and costs. When employees are helped and encouraged to stay well, this people-positive policy results in triple benefits: reduced worker absenteeism, increased employee productivity, and lower company expenditures for health costs. Health care programs at the worksite offer these benefits: a supportive network, useful data of practical value to health insurance claims, and appreciation of a convenient program. The more popular worksite programs include smoking cessation, exercise-fitness, nutrition-weight control, alcohol-drug abuse control, hypertension control, heart attack risk reduction, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, cancer risk reduction, stress management, employee assistance program, and accident risk reduction. In the design of effective wellness programs, realistic goals and objectives need to be established. Key considerations for employers planning employee health promotion programs are securing commitment of management, communicating effectively to motivate employee participation, applying educational diagnosis and evaluation, developing a data system, and securing involvement and support of employees' physicians. (An alphabetical listing of organizations that can provide information and advice on worksite wellness programs are attached.) (YLB)

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Abstract:

Staying Well At Work

Employee wellness directly affects business/industry operations and costs. Growing evidence underscores the valuable potential of employer intervention in the health needs of their employees; i.e., costs savings associated with such wellness programs can be very substantial; e.g., New York Telephone anticipates a total annual savings of $24 million when it fully implements its several keep-fit programs.

Despite the enprmous range of public interest in health, (joggers; weight watchers; aerobic exercisers; etc.), employers can help promote good health habits and practices through on-site, company-sponsored wellness programs.

Timely intervention among members of the workforce in helping to reduce health risk factors can lead to curtailed premature death and disability rates. This is a priority social commitment for employers which is also a sound busines s investment!

Dr. Boris Blai, Jr.

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Staying Well At Work

Overview

Employee wellness directly affects business/industry operations and costs. Simply stated, "wellness" is the lifestyle individuals choose in which they aim to achieve and maintain good personal health. When employees are helped and encouraged to stay well, this people-positive policy can result in triple benefits:

1- reduced worker absenteeism
2- increased employee productivity
3- lower company expenditures for health costs.

As Peele (1985) noted:

"Business has recently made a revolutionary discovery. A good office environment can help keep people well. Major corporations have decided the health of their employees is a company asset, and have started investing in 'workplace wellness' packages. Companies like IBM, Xerox and AT & T even use such programs as competitive selling points for having MBAs and other professional staff." (p.39)

In addition, as Harris (1985) has recently noted:

"Companies are finally getting serious about employee nutrition, exercise and health education. ....Whereever you work, you may soon notice a remarkable difference. Your company, if it is alert, is apt to test one of the practical health packages now coming into use. An entire new service industry is rushing into national competition for the chance to coax the U.S. workforce to a fitter life. ... and thus reduce corporate medical costs." (p. 14)

When a high level of employee wellness exists in an organization, the well-being of individual employees, their families, and the society of which they are a part, are all advanced to higher levels of satisfaction; i.e., morale. This sense of greater personal well-being helps to create a healthier community - a goal which has both universal appeal and approval.

The Health Insurance Association (1983) has cogently commented:

"The motivation to undertake health promotion is very strong indeed. Each year more than 330 million workdays are lost because of illness and disability. The result: many billions of dollars in medical expenses, lost productivity, and diminished well-being of employees and their families." (p.3)

"Employers are clearly getting the message. More and more they are sponsoring activities designed to improve the health practices and life-styles

of their workers. And amidst these efforts, evidence grows that carefully conceived and executed programs hold the prospect of better health for employees and substantial long-term cost savings." (p.4)

Worksite Health Programs

What are the specific benefits of health care programs at the worksite? A number of practical answers to this question include the following:

1- A supportive network is established to help and encourage workers in their determined efforts to stay well. This is mutually beneficial, both to employees and employers.

2- Useful data can be collected in connection with health insurance claims. Such information can be of practical value to management when considering work operations modifications, both environmental and others.

3- Individuals appreciate and respond to the convenience of an on-site, company-sponsored health-wellness program.

4- Employees spend the greater proportion of their waking hours at the worksite. This fact has an important influence on their social attitudes and habits; i.e., worksite health-wellness programs improves employees' sense of well-being and morale.

Among the more popular worksite programs, in companies both large and small, are the following:

1-"Smoking cessation
2- Exercise-fitness
3- Nutrition-weight control
4- Alcohol-drug abuse control
5- Hypertension control
6- Heart attack risk reduction
7- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
8- Cancer risk reduction
9- Stress management**
10- Employee assistance program
11- Accident risk reduction" (Health, 1984: p.4)

**Stress in the workplace may be the No.1 adult health problem in the United States today, with costs to industry/business estimated at $100 billion dollars annually in terms of absenteeism, reduced productivity, and direct medical expenses. Put into perspective, that represents more than ten times the loss from all strikes combined !

Some examples of successful worksite wellness programs include:

Smoking cessation

Becton-Dickonson & Co. sells its employees quit smoking, self-help manuals at cost. It then returns this fee to those succeed in quitting.

Hypertension control

Ford Motor Co. has a blood pressure and treatment program. It is part of an overall cardiovascular tension program. Started in 1972 when it discovered that heart attacks accounted for 28 percent of the medical costs of the Michigan headquarters.

Fitness-exercise

Bonnie Bell Co. has a jogging path through the woods with exercise stations en route. Also exercise classes three times weekly, tennis courts and lessons, exercise rooms and shower facilities. Financial incentives are provided for exercising regularly.

Weight control

Sherer Brothers Lumber has a nutritionist who plans wholesome meals which are served free of charge. The snack machine dispenses fruit instead of candy.

Stress management

Ford Motor Co. in its corporate headquarters offers its employees use of its recreation facilities and department several times per week for instruction in transandental meditation and yoga.

Medical self-care

Armco Steel Co. conducts an employee health awareness program emphasizing self-help. It uses a 167-page book on health tips for the family.

Back-related problems

A "Healthy Back" program has been designed by Burlington Industries to relieve pain and prevent further injury and time away from work. Prior to program, one-third of employees had over 400 days of absence due to back problems. After one year, the same employees had only 19 days absence.

Health Screening

Canon Mills has a voluntary Health Maintenance Screening Program for employees. Among other tests it includes eye exams, blood pressure, blood sugar, cardiograms, prostate, and breast self-examination instruction.

In addition, health promotion is a concern of many of the health care coalitions formed in communities throughout the country to help contain health costs. An example is the Omaha Wellness Council. Some 70 companies in Omama have joined the council. This represents more than 60,000 employees who participate actively in wellness programs.

Research has indicated that most people seem to need sustained help in order for them not to imperial their personal health. Among the high-risk factors contributing to the most common causes of death; i.e., heart disease; cancer; stroke; are the following: all may be helped by appropriate company-sponsored health-wellness programs:

1- Lack of exercise
2- Poor nurtition
3- Inability to manage proper health maintenance habits
4- Smoking and alcohol abuse

Today, unfortunately, these high-risk factors alone take a devastating toll among millions of Americans !

In the design of effective wellness programs, realistic goals and objectives need to be established. Adequate start-up time must also be allocated because such programs require time to produce results. Dr. Robert E. Dedmon, staff vice-president of Kimberly-Clark, offers the following key considerations for employers planning employee health promotion programs:

"1-Secure the commitment of the chief executive officer and other senior management to health promotion progrwms.

2-Use persuasive, medically-valid, well-designed and clearly presented communications to motivate the employees to participate.

3- Apply educational diagnosis and evaluation, with specificm practical and achievable behavioral objectives.

4- Develop data systems that provide clear and meaningful information.

5- Share data, experience and ideas among companies.

6- Arrange occupational training programs for appropriate physicians, nurses and managers in effective health educationstrategies.

7- Put some emphasis on screening, but place maximum stress on intervention after detecting a problem. The yield and cost effectiveness of various screening tests should be constantly re-evaluated.

8- Secure the involvment and support of local employees' personal physicians." (Health, 1983: p. 12)

Speaking of "involvment" (item 8 above), it is extremely important to involve the employees who are the principal 'beneficiaries' of such wellness-at-work programs. The interests and preferenes of employees are key elements. They are directly related to program effectiveness: they are, in short, sine qua non - a necessity!

Realistically, companies may not be in a position to launch and maintain an extensive program. And it may be advisable and possible for several small companies to jointly finance a program made available for all of their employees.

Conclusions

Growing data resources underscores the potential of employer intervention in the health needs of their employees. Costs savings associated with such wellness programs can be very substantial; e.g., New York Telephone anticipates a total annual savings of $24 million when it fully implements its several keep-fit programs. Another example - experts now project savings of about $600 per year for each individual who stops smoking.

Economic considerations aside, there is a less tangible, intrinsic benefit for any employer; the opportunity to contribute to the priceless gift of good health. Despite the enormous range of public interest in health promotion; i.e., the joggers; all the weight watchers - employers can still help the workers to help themselves to good health habits and practices. Such help, through on-site, company-sponsored wellness programs, is a sound business investment; it is not

a 'do-good', paternalistic gesture !

As Health Insurance Association (1983) concludes:

> "Timely intervention to reduce .... risk factors that lead to premature death or disability among the workforce should be a priority commitment of the business community.
>
> "And whether the commitment takes the form of a major involvment in elaborate exercise facilities, or simply a #no smoking" policy or snack machines that dispense fruit, the message to the employee is the same: 'We care about your well-being' ". (p.15)

Resources: Where to go for help

Worksite health programs are one of the fastest and most encouraging signs of the shifting health care scene in America. To help facilitate this development, there are numerous organizations which can provide valuable information and advice on worksite-wellness programs. The following alphabetical listing is only representative; it is not a definitive bibliography nor a total listing of organizations "where you can go for help".

Accidents

National Safety Council
444 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60611

Free General Materials Catalog available. Chartered by Congress, a privately-supported organization, dedicated to the prevention of accidents and occupational disease.

Alcohol & Drug Abuse

Center of Alcohol Studies
Education & Training Division
Busch Campus - Smithers Hall
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, N.J. 08903

Offers free information on workplace alcohol abuse prevention.

Phoenix House
Drug Prevention & Education Dept.
164 W. 74th. St.
New York, N.Y. 10023

National drug abuse organization. Offers free information on work-related problems and concerns.

Nat'l Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information
P.O.Box 2345
Rockville, Md. 20852

Nat'l Clearinghouse on Drug Abuse Information
Rm 10A53, Parklawn Bldg.
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Md. 20857

Cancer

American Cancer Society
Public Information Dept.
777 Third Ave.
New York, N.W. 10017 (or local chapter)
Offers free information

Diabetes

American Diabetes Association
2 Park Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10016

Nat'l Diabetes Information Clearinghouse
Box NDIC
Bethesda, Md. 20205

Exercise & Fitness

American Association of Fitness
Directors in Business & Industry
965 Hope Drive
Stamford, CT. 06907
Free brochure

President's Council on Physical
Fitness & Sports
400 Sixth. St. SW.
Washington, D.C. 20201
Free: Fitness in the Workplace: A Handbook on Employee Programs.

Heart Disease

American Heart Association
1740 Broadway
New York, N.Y. (or local chapter)
Offers free information

Nat'L Heart, Lung & Blood Institute
Public Inquiries Office
Rm 4A21, Bldg. 31.
Nat'L Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Md. 20205
Offers free information

High Blood Pressure

American Heart Association
1740 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10019
Offers free information

High Blood Pressure Information Center
120/80 Nat'l Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Md. 20205

Lung Disease

American Lung Association
1740 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10019
Offers free information

Mental Health

Nat'l Clearinghouse for Mental Health Information
Public Inquiries Section
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Md. 20857
Offers free information

Nat'l Mental Health Association
1800 N. Kent St.
Arlington, Va. 22209 (or local chapter)
Offers free information

Nutrition

American Heart Association
7320 Greenville Ave.
Dallas, TX. 75231
Free information on work-related programs.

The American Dietetic Association
430 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60611
Referral service for nutrition consultants that do at-work programs throughout the country.

Smoking Cessation

Action for Smoking & Health
2013 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
Free: Guide to a Smoke-Free Workplace and other booklet & reprints.

American Cancer Society
4 W. 35th. St.
New York, N.Y.
Free Smokeout kits for employees.

Office of Cancer Communivation
Nat'l Cancer Institute
Rm. 10A18, Bldg. 31.
Nat'l Institute of Health
Bethesda, Md. 20205
Offers free information.

Overall Wellness Programs

The American Council of Like Insurance
Heath Insurance Association of America
1850 K. Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
Free booklet: Your Guide to Wellness at Work.

U.S.Dep't of Health & Human Services
Public Health Service
Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion
300 7th. Street. SW. Rm. 613
Washington, D.C. 20201
(1) "Staying Healthy". Abibliography of Health Promotion Materials. It makes timely and relevant health information readily accessible.
(2) "Worksite Health Promotion" A bibliography of selected books and resources.

Washington Business Group on Health
229½ Pennsylvania Ave. SE.
Washington, D.C. 20003
Publishes "Corporate Commentary" four times a yeaar; a magazine designed to be an evaluation resource, featuring practical, up-to-date information for professionals evaluating the impact of worksite health programs on employees' health and employers' c osts.

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Health Insurance Association of America. "Your Guide to Wellness at the Worksite". Washington, D.C. 1983.

Peele, Stanton. "Does Your Office Have Bad Habits?" American Health; September 1985.

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